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The six hundred and forty-ninth meeting of the Club was held at the Rembrandt Hotel, London, on the 20th February, 1968.

Chairman: Dr. J. F. Monk.

Members present: 17; Guests 5.

Mr. Michael Fogden gave a talk, well illustrated with coloured slides, on some birds of Borneo and their role among some of the tribes as augurial agents.

**On the birds of the Pjorsarver district in central Iceland,
with special reference to the Pink-footed Goose**

by S. R. PEPPER

Received 16th February, 1968

An expedition from Radley College, Berkshire, visited the Pjorsarver oasis in central Iceland during August, 1966. It spent five weeks in the area, shown in the sketch map, investigating the feeding habits of the Pink-footed Goose, *Anser fabalis*.

The movements of the expedition were as follows:—

Fossrofuloekur (base-camp)	..	31st July	—	8th August
Hveravellir	9th August	—	15th August
Nauthagi, Pjorsarver	17th August	—	24th August
Fossrofuloekur	26th August	—	29th August
Hvervellir	29th August	—	4th September

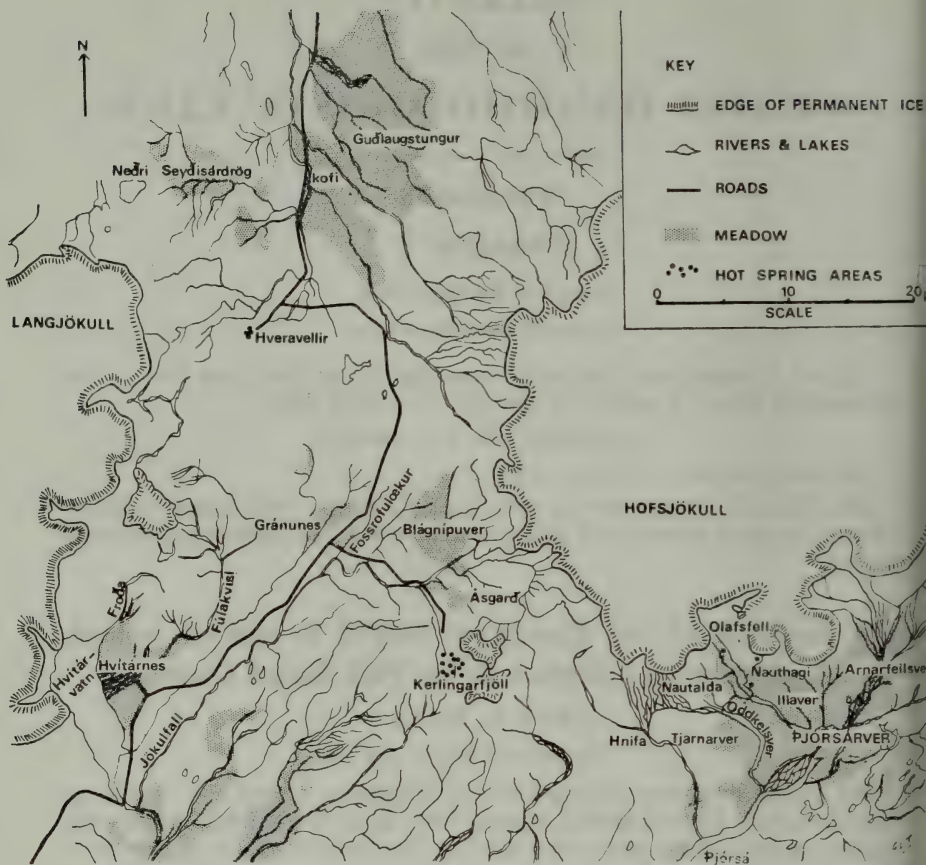
Twenty-five species of birds were seen in Pjorsarver.

Red-throated Diver, *Gavia stellata*

Seen once in the Pjorsarver: a single bird, at Arnarfellsver on 21st August. Elsewhere also only once: at Gudlaugstungur on 12th August, when three were seen at close range, fishing in a tributary of the Blanda river.

Pink-footed Goose, *Anser fabalis*

The commonest bird in the Pjorsarver, breeding in very large numbers. Non-breeding colonies of young adults found in Blagnipuver and



Hvitarnes, and colonies with evidence of breeding in the Jokulfall gorge, at Granunes and at Gudlaugstungur. Most families in the Pjorsarver consisted of the two adults and two, three or four goslings. Three-quarters of the goslings were six-eight weeks old and almost completely fledged. Some detailed observations were made on four families. The principal difficulties were the discomfort of watching without a 'hide' and the wariness of the geese.

Detailed observations were also made on a group of five goslings, unaccompanied by adults. Such groups were common, apparently not the result of human disturbance, and far easier to observe without the adults.

The families were watched for about three-quarters of an hour each. The group of unaccompanied goslings was watched closely for seven hours on 21st August and general observations were made on the following three days.

The goslings were always either preening or feeding. When with adults, they usually kept within ten yards of one adult and only stopped feeding to

keep up with the movements of the family. Unaccompanied goslings would continue to feed unconcerned until one approached within fifteen yards. However, adults with or without goslings, would move away at the first sight of humans. Without goslings they usually took flight: with goslings they usually ran off, often faster than the goslings could follow, so that adults and goslings at times became separated by as much as fifty yards. The goslings of a family always remained a group, not more than five yards across, which became smaller when they were occupied with preening.

Preening played an important part in the gosling's life, and the group of unaccompanied goslings under observation preened synchronously at times separated by 70, 70, 75, 75 and 80 minutes in that order. The preening sessions lasted 17, 17, 12, ten and seven minutes. Overall, therefore, the goslings spent approximately 15 per cent of the 18 daylight hours preening and 85 per cent feeding.

Goslings with adults behaved similarly. In the single family that appeared to be totally unaware of the observers, the adults were preening at the start of the period of observation. During the next hour they spent (respectively) eight and eight minutes preening, 12 and nine minutes motionless, and ten and 13 minutes feeding. and they were feeding as they passed from view. This suggests that adults spend less time feeding than goslings and more time motionless (*i.e.* on watch). In the other families watched, when the adults were clearly aware of the observers, they did not preen and fed only intermittently.

During the four days of observation, the group of unaccompanied goslings confined themselves to an area about 200 yards long and 150 yards wide, between the river Miklavisl and Nautalda, which they covered thoroughly every day. Every morning the goslings moved onto the dry ground of the lower slopes of Nautalda, where they fed exclusively on the Crowberry, *Empetrum nigrum* for about three hours, returning afterwards to the wetter ground.

Whooper Swan, *Cygnus cygnus*

Common in all districts: estimated number in Pjorsarver, 15 pairs (three pairs with cygnets). Outside Pjorsarver at least one pair in each meadow visited. In Gudlaugstungur, a non-breeding colony of about 40 birds was found on a small lake, the banks of which were littered with discarded feathers.

Whooper Swans were always wary, particularly so when with cygnets, and they were only approachable when on the water, where they would stay in case of danger.

One very late family was recorded on 9th August in Oddkelsver; the adults were still unflighted and their cygnets were the youngest seen.

In all, 31 pairs were seen; nine pairs had cygnets; three pairs had four and six had three.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*

Only once observed in the Pjorsarver, a single bird at Oddkelsver on 19th August. Otherwise seen on three occasions. Many Mallard seen on a trip to Myvatn in the north of Iceland at the beginning of September.

Wigeon, *Anas penelope*

One seen in a meadow by Nautalda on 22nd August.

Pintail, *Anas acuta*

Present in very small numbers. Three in Oddkelsver on 19th August; four seen at one time in Illaver on 20th August, another in the same area the next day and another at Nauthagi on 22nd August.

Only seen once outside Pjorsarver, at Gudlaugstungur on 13th August (four birds).

Long-tailed Duck, *Clangula hyemalis*

Common in Pjorsarver and gregarious at time of visit. A flock of 27 birds seen on a pond in Oddkelsver on 19th August, and small groups in Illanver and Tjarnarver on 21st and 24th August. Several were males in breeding, plumage. Not uncommon in meadows outside Pjorsarver but mainly in pairs or singly.

Iceland Falcon, *Falco rusticolus*

Single birds seen on several occasions around Nautalda, sometimes perching on a cairn at the top where pellets were found, presumably of this falcon and of Merlin.

On 22nd August some members of the expedition disturbed an Iceland Falcon killing a four-week-old gosling. Having attempted, without success to fly off with its prey, the falcon waited on a nearby rock for some time before eventually disappearing.

It was presumed that a pair was nesting in Jokulkriki, which would account for all our sightings of Iceland Falcons in the Pjorsarver.

The gorge of the Jokulfall, just upstream of its confluence had many geese nesting on the brink of the gorge, and on two occasions a single falcon was seen to fly into the gorge and out of sight, but no nest was found.

Merlin, *Falco columbarius*

A single bird was seen on several occasions around Nautalda, perhaps a pair. Several Merlin pellets were found by a cairn on the top of Nautalda, where one was perched on 17th August. Probably resident and breeding.

Only one Merlin was seen outside Pjorsarver, at Fossrofuloekur on 4th September, chasing a Meadow Pipit.

Ptarmigan, *Lagopus mutus*

This bird was not seen in the Pjorsarver, though droppings were found on Nautalda and Oddkeslalda. This was certainly not a 'Ptarmigan Year' but four families were seen outside the Pjorsarver, on the 7th, 12th, 13th and 31st August, broods numbering four, five, four and four respectively. Both adults were seen on two occasions. A brood seen at Gudlaugstungur on 12th August was just fledged.

Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*

Present, but not common; two adults and a juvenile seen frequently on Nautalda.

Otherwise one bird seen at Geysir on the inward journey and one at Hveravellir Hot Springs on 10th August.

Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*

Ubiquitous in central Iceland. Certainly the commonest bird outside the Pjorsarver. Many large flocks in Pjorsarver, numbering hundreds of birds. On 19th August, one large flock of about 80 birds was accompanied by some 50 Dunlin. These birds are frequently observed together, but the basis of their very marked relationship remains obscure.

Earlier, seen always as individuals or in very small flocks not exceeding ten birds. Many juveniles seen here and a long-abandoned nest with three dead chicks found in Asgard on 7th August. Innumerable birds seen almost every day in central Iceland until 24th August, after which only one flock recorded, heard overhead on the night of 30th August, at Hveravellir.

Purple Sandpiper, *Calidris maritima*

Individuals seen in Pjorsarver on three occasions. Also four times outside Pjorsarver.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*

Dunlins were very common in Pjorsarver and frequently seen in large flocks, often accompanying Golden Plover. Common also in the meadows of the Kerlingarfjoll and Hveravellir districts, but not recorded at all after the visit to Pjorsarver, *i.e.* after 24th August.

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*

One heard at night at Nauthagi Cold Springs on 19th August, and a pair seen in Nauthagi on 21st August. Elsewhere only once; at Hvitarnes on 6th August, where more than 20 birds were seen in the very marshy area east of the lake.

Snipe, *Capella gallinago*

Seen only in Pjorsarver (except two individuals in Gudlaugstungur on 13th August). A pair in Nathagi, seen together once on 21st August, and one of which seen almost daily. Also one bird in Oddkelsver on 19th August.

Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus*

Abundant. By 17th August, when we arrived in Pjorsarver, migration had apparently started. Several individuals and a large flock of at least 50 birds seen in Oddkelsver on 19th August.

In all meadows outside Pjorsarver, sometimes in groups of five-10 birds. In Asgard, one bird seen upending deliberately to pick crustaceans (*Lepidurus arcticus*) off the bottom of a small pool. This upending activity was not seen in any other individual.

Arctic Skua, *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Common, particularly in Pjorsarver, where it was estimated 22 birds were resident in Illaver and Oddkelsver alone (eight pale phase, one intermediate and 13 dark). A group of one dark and two light phase Arctic Skuas was commonly around Nautalda. They were frequently seen mobbing Great Black-backed Gulls, and once a Raven; none of the victims was carrying food.

On 21st August a dark and light phase skua were seen to catch and devour a Wheatear.

In the Kerlingarfjoll and Hveravellir districts the intermediate phase was predominant, while a light phase skua was seen only once. In Gudlaugstungur two 'intermediates' were seen chasing a Meadow Pipit for several minutes, finally giving up the chase. No skuas were seen in the north of Iceland, indicating surely that they are strongly associated with breeding Pink-footed Geese. There was no evidence in the Pjorsarver of their actually killing the geese or goslings, although there were several corpses found which had presumably been killed by another predator and yet had evidence of scavenging by skuas, such as the removal of eyes and breast meat. The immediate presence of skuas was never seen to cause any disturbance among the geese.

Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*

Only recorded in Pjorsarver where it was estimated there were 19 individuals in the Oddkelsver and Illaver meadows. These birds must seasonally depend entirely on the goose population for food, migrating to the coastal farming areas during the winter. One was seen killing a gosling which it had separated from the adult geese. In contrast to the Iceland Falcon the gull was easily frightened away and quickly lost apparent interest in its prey.

Arctic Tern, *Sterna macrura*

Seen only twice in Pjorsarver (Illaver; 20th, 21st August) and twice in Gudlaugstungur (12th 13th August). On each occasion observed from a great distance in flocks of ten to 20 birds.

Meadow Pipit, *Anthus pratensis*

Very common in and outside Pjorsarver, becoming gregarious towards the end of August and seen in flocks of 30-40 birds at Nauthagi by 22nd August.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*

Common at Nauthagi, but infrequent elsewhere in the Pjorsarver. This may be due to the hot springs there which probably breed a luscious crop of insect life. Outside the Pjorsarver they seemed to have a definite association with hot springs; they were common at Hveravellir but otherwise scarce. The numbers at Hveravellir increased during our visit there (9th-15th August) though little movement was noticeable; two weeks later only two individuals were seen in four days.

Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Seen with increasing frequency, indicating presumably that a few Wheatears breed in these areas and that many were congregating from breeding grounds elsewhere. There was a daily increase in numbers at Hveravellir Hot Springs, over the week 9th-15th August from one bird on 9th to many on 15th August. A very active flock of 20-30 birds was seen every day on Nautalda. Wheatears were seen to be preyed on by Merlins and Arctic Skuas.

Redwing, *Turdus iliacus*

One dead bird found by Olafsfell on 23rd August.

Snow Bunting, *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Frequently seen. Flocks of over 20 birds most days at Nautalda and a similar flock at Oddkelsalda on 19th August. Earlier they were more often in small groups of ten-15 birds, and occasionally as individuals.

Raven, *Corvus corax*

Only one pair observed which was resident at Nautalda. The scarcity of this species was surprising since an abundance of fresh gosling corpses provides an ample food supply.

Ravens were frequently seen outside Pjorsarver. A pair was resident near Fossrofuloekur and six were seen at one time at Hveravellir on 1st September. Much less common, however, than in the farming areas nearer the coast where they are abundant.

On nominate *Lybius leucomelas* (Boddaert)

by P. A. CLANCEY

Received 20th December, 1967

Since Winterbottom (1958) reviewed the races of the Pied Barbet *Lybius leucomelas* (Boddaert), *sens. strict.*, of southern Africa, his conclusions have given rise to numerous communications in the periodic literature. Notes and papers on subspeciation in this barbet published since the stated revision in 1958 are Clancey (1959, 1963, 1967), Irwin and Benson (1967), Traylor (1965), and Winterbottom (1962).

In my recent Catalogue of Birds of the South African Sub-Region (1965) I admit five races of this barbet as against the three recognised by Winterbottom. A new study of the racial variation in *L. leucomelas* recently undertaken at the Durban Museum confirms the races and their ranges as laid down in my Catalogue and has thrown further light on the disposition of the southern populations with the medio-ventral plane speckled with black, with which I associate the name *L. l. leucomelas* (Boddaert), 1785: Cape of Good Hope, Cape Province, but to which Winterbottom attaches *L. l. namaqua* (Sclater), 1922: Klipfontein, north-western Cape Province.

In his efforts to preserve *namaqua* as discrete from nominate *leucomelas*, Winterbottom moved the type-locality of the latter from the present day Cape of Good Hope east to Beaufort West, in the Karoo of the Cape. This action was taken with the aim of allocating nominate *leucomelas* to birds with whitish and unspotted or largely unspotted median underparts, on the grounds that no reference was made to such spotting in the description of the species in Latham, *Gen. Syn. Birds*, vol. i, 2, 1782, p. 502, upon which Boddaert's *Bucco leucomelas* was founded. As the entire nomenclatural edifice of *L. leucomelas* rests on the correct determination of the populations to which *B. leucomelas* was first applied, particular attention was paid to this issue during my recent research into this species and its variation.